

JOHNSON, SYDNEY - Died 1st July 1916 aged 21

15294 Private, 1st Battalion, Lincolnshire Regiment



Accreditation - <https://tinyurl.com/2kbvaznx>

Sydney was born in 1895 at North Somercotes, the son of George and Mary Ann (nee Laking) who was always called Polly. His older brother was Walter and the five younger children were Ernest, Albert Edward, Leonard, Hilda May and Cyril George. By 1901 the family was living at Skidbrooke, near Saltfleetby, where his father was a shoemaker.

George moved his family back to North Somercotes where he and his wife lived out their days. Here Sydney became apprenticed at the General Stores of Maurice Armstrong, a draper from Spalding who had worked in London.

Sydney probably moved to Scotter around 1911 and joined up in 1915.

He disembarked in France on 30th June 1915. Later that year his battalion was involved in the Battle of Loos from 25th September to 19th October. This was the first battle where the British used chlorine gas to supplement the artillery barrage and on the first day they attacked Bellewaarde. 50,000 men were lost in the Loos campaign resulting in a re-organisation of parts of the Army.

On 14th November they transferred to the 62nd Infantry Brigade, 21st Division. This brigade was heavily involved in the Battle of the Somme, and on 1st July 1916 was attacking just north of Fricourt. Sydney's battalion was held in reserve at Meaulte, near Albert, during the early hours of that day.

Simpson's regimental history says:-

'The battalion, detailed to carry S.A.A. Mills grenades and Stokes mortar bombs, left the billets at Meaulte at 8am, and moved to Bon Accord and the Mareschail Streets, where the loads were picked up. At 1.30pm the carrying parties began to cross No Man's Land to the captured German front line, whence they proceeded to a dump immediately north of the eastern end of Patch Alley on the sunken road. Having dumped their loads, companies returned to the old German front line (Sausage Trench) which they consolidated. This was very difficult, for the terrific effect of the British bombardment was evident in the shapeless masses of earth which had once been a trench. Moreover, hostile machine-gun and artillery fire swept the position....'

Sydney was killed that day.

His name is one of more than 72,000 listed on the Thiepval memorial in France for those with no known grave. PLOT – Pier and Face 1 C.

He is also remembered in North Somercotes along with his uncle, Regimental Sergeant Major Herbert Laking M.M. (Military Medal) of the West Yorkshire. Both are commemorated on their village War Memorial and on a plaque inside St. Mary's church. (Sydney's Christian name is spelt incorrectly on the plaque in the church, as it is on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website.)

On 21st July 1916 the Gainsborough News reported:-

'News is to hand that Pte. Sidney Johnson, of North Somercotes, has been killed in action. For some five to six years previous to his joining the colours Pte. Johnson was in business in Scotter. His quiet, courteous manner had the respect of all.'

The next day his family placed a memoriam in the 'Louth and North Lincolnshire Advertiser':-

'Killed in action on July 1st, Sydney, the beloved son of G. and M.A. Johnson of North Somercotes aged 21 years. May he rest in peace. Mr and Mrs Johnson wish to thank all kind friends for their deep sympathy in their sad and sudden bereavement'

In the same issue of the newspaper North Somercotes reported events of the previous Sunday:-

'On the same day, at 3-15pm., a second memorial service was held in the Parish Church and this time for Private Sydney Johnson, a young man deeply respected by all for his excellent character, and his devotion to duty. Again the Vicar and Chaplain officiated, conducting the beautiful funeral service. Suitable hymns were sung, and the glorious Psalm, 90th chanted. A large congregation assembled to show respect for one who was so young to defend and save them; and heart-felt sympathy for the bereaved family, which were present at the service.'

On the next three anniversaries of his death the family again placed words in memoriam:-

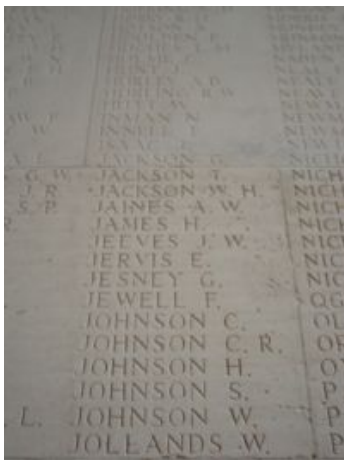
'In ever loving memory of Sydney, the dearly loved son of George and Mary Ann Johnson, North Somercotes, who was killed in action in France, July 1st, 1916. From his sorrowing father, mother, brothers and sister, and fiancée Dora.'

*Days of sadness still come o'er us,
Hidden tears of times flow,
For memory keeps our dear boy near us,
Although he died a year ago'*

'In loving memory of our dear son, Sydney Johnson, of North Somercotes, aged 21 years, killed in France July 1st 1916. From his mother and father, brothers and sister and fiancée Dora.'

'In ever loving memory of our dear Sydney, who was killed in France July 1st 1916 aged 21 years. From his loving father, mother, brothers and sister.'

*Three years have passed away,
Since this great sorrow fell,
But in our hearts we mourn the loss,
Of him we loved so well'*



Thiepval memorial



St. Mary's church,
North Somercotes